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SURVIVORS OF THE FOREST IN TORONTO:

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BY

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SURVIVORS OF THE FORESTS IN TORONTO.*

It is but seldom at the present era that we fall in with any of the aborigines of our country, with a lineal descendant of one or other of the Algonquin or Iroquois tribes formerly in possession in these parts, but some such lineal descendants do exist, and whenever we happen to meet with them, whether performing their duty to the State like their pale-faced brethren, in one of the professions, or doing governmental work in one of the departments, or as engaged in agricultural pursuits, we are always well inclined to look upon them with an especial regard and interest.

But these are not the reminders of our primitive past that I am now about to refer to. There are still existing within the limits of the City of Toronto, scattered about in different directions, some survivors of the forest which a hundred years since overspread this region, some of them accidentally left standing and some of them intentionally preserved in an infantile or sapling state by our grandfathers, with a view to future ornament or shade; in many instances the latter now assuming dimensions vieing with those of their fellows of a much earlier date. By a kind of analogy I cannot help associating with these inanimate objects thoughts somewhat similar to those which cluster round the living aborigines of the country. A fine old tree seems a kind of sentient thing—we fancy it must be conscious of its own history and of the transactions which may have taken place beneath the shadow of its branches; we feel inclined to question it as to its own origin and the secrets which it may perchance have in its keeping; just as in the former day we would have questioned a hoary-

*Paper read before the Canadian Institute, Toronto, Nov. 25, 1893, by the Rev. Dr. Scadding.

headed chieftain among the red men whom we might chance to encounter.

How natural it was that the exiled duke in the play, as he contemplated the forest scenes around him, should find not only books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, but likewise on occasion, also tongues in the trees.

The relics of our forests which from their evident age and venerable appearance we might expect to be able to give forth oracular responses, as the old oaks of Dodona are said to have done, have become very few, but examples of a later generation, now of noble height and ample girth and diameter, are numerous enough, and it is pleasing to notice that the authorities, with a becoming feeling of reverence, have not ventured to molest them, even when found to encroach on the space allotted for sidewalks, along several of our principal thoroughfares.

There are at the present moment two trees which are pre-eminent as survivors of the original forest—two trees which, as saplings probably were standing where they now stand one hundred years ago, when in 1793 the first Governor of the Province projected and laid out the city on the shore of our bay. Both of them are elms and both of them are situated on John street—a name which curiously happens to be a souvenir of the first name of the Governor referred to, while Graves street, now changed to Simcoe street, once commemorated his second name, and "Simcoe Place," now wholly disused, denoting the square where the old Parliament Buildings stand, preserved or was supposed to preserve his surname, "Simcoe."

On the east side of John street, a hundred yards or so to the north of St. George's Church and enclosed within the grounds appertaining to the parsonage house of that church, is to be seen a noble elm tree rising up to well-nigh two thirds the height of the neighboring steeple. Its gigantic bole, cleanly barked and free of branches to a great height, shows that

it once stood in the midst of a surrounding grove, and its luxuriant crest outlined on the sky retains the graceful form so characteristic of trees of this genus.

I now turn to the fellow of this tree, situated on the west side of John street. Near the foot of this street, not very far northward from the well known Greenland Fishery corner, stands another well developed elm, a denizen of the original forest. The stem at its base is of considerable diameter, but its height is not so remarkable as that of the one near St. George's Church, the upper portion of the tree having become expanded into a large and picturesque group of branches. This tree encroaches somewhat upon the sidewalk by the house No. 32 John street.

Not many years since two other examples of lofty, well-grown elms were standing on the low ground in the rear of the Macdonnell mansion, at the south-east corner of John street and Richmond street, and nearly in front of the entrance to Beverley House, on Richmond street. These have been obliged to succumb before the builder, as their few surviving confreres will in due time be compelled to do.

Again, near the intersection of Beverley street with Dorset street, there are several full-grown native elms standing irregularly in their original positions, and forming a pleasant bowery bit of scenery; one, quite bulky, standing in the pathway, shows high up on its stem a number of small, feathery branchlets thrown out after the manner of certain elms not generally to be seen here.

Elm street derives its name from a solitary forest elm which was long conspicuous in the north-west angle formed by the intersection of that street with Yonge street. On the line of Yonge street, some miles to the northward, before coming to Thornhill, old residents will remember a gigantic elm which towered up on the west side of the road, within the allowance for the highway, preserved there as a land-

mark, probably by the original surveyor of the region, and there possibly it may still stand.

In the west side of the playground of the Normal School is a well-developed specimen of the Canadian spreading or drooping elm. Three remarkably fine elms of the second growth occur in the midst of the side-walk on the west side of Sherbourne street opposite, respectively, to the residences numbered 272, 282, and 286. Near the South Drive, Rosedale, north of Bloor Street, are several fine old elms. Near the foot of the Sugar Loaf Hill, in the direction of the Don, are also some fine specimens of the same tree. The meadows on the east side of the river, once so rural and well supplied with elms, are now unhappily disfigured by the many brick manufactories established there. The valley of the Don used formerly to contain fine specimens of the lime or linden tree, popularly known as the basswood, erroneous for bastwood, from the inner bark of this tree used in the manufacture of bast mats, ropes, and Indian baskets; likewise gigantic specimens of the buttonwood tree, or platanus, *i.e.*, the plane tree, remarkable for the peeling-off condition of its outer bark. An early water-color sketch of Castle Frank, which I possess, shows close by the Don two specimens of the buttonwood in its peeling-off condition, which might consequently be mistaken for birch. Near the mouth of the Castle Frank brook, as the little stream passing through the Castle Frank property was called, there long survived, on the opposite bank of the Don, a grove of the wild Canadian willow, a tree sometimes employed formerly for shade purposes along our back streets. I remember the first time I saw olive trees growing in the south of France, I was struck with their strong resemblance in point of foliage and general form to some of our wild Canadian willows. At the present moment, far to the westward on the north side of College street, a cluster of gnarled and irregular willow trees is to be

seen, with stems of a great diameter, remnants evidently of a grove of Canadian wild willows which differ considerably from the imported European willow. The group referred to occurs in a swale or patch of low land on the old Oak Hill property formerly belonging to General Aeneas Shaw. On the west side of Dufferin street, a short distance to the north, on the edge of the lake, are some fine tall specimens of the Canadian willow overshadowing the Gwynne property, but these are transplanted trees of the second growth.

The soil around Toronto does not seem in general to have been very favorable to the development of the oak on any grand scale, but in the Queen's Park, on the level ground at the north-west of the Parliament Buildings, specimens occur in considerable numbers of this tree, with stems of goodly diameter and branches affording an extended shade. Every year, of course, insensibly adds to the girth and general dimensions of these trees. It is to be hoped that a century hence—nay, centuries hence—they may still be found standing here, honoured and beloved, like so many renowned congeners of theirs in the old country. Farther north in the Park is a large patch of the mixed original forest, which it is hoped may likewise long remain undisturbed.

East of the Queen's Park, just where St. Albans street begins, in the grounds round the residence of Mr. Christie, are some stately native oaks gracefully draped with Virginia creeper. In the Horticultural Garden are well-grown specimens of early oaks, several near the gardener's lodge and several near the rosary. Near the Prince of Wales' maple tree is a specimen of the English oak, planted here subsequently by his brother, Prince Arthur, which shows the habit of the English oak in regard to the lateral outspread of its branches, when it has liberty to expand them. The Canadian oak seems to be inclined to branch out at a greater height above the ground. A large oak occurs in the sidewalk on Gerrard Street,

on the north side, a little to the west of Sherbourne street. Not far from the lodge at the front gate of the residence known as the "Grange," a solitary oak tree is noticeable. The other trees in these grounds are chiefly graceful elms of the second growth reserved from the original forest. Some other example of a primitive oak should not be omitted, namely that which stands a little to the west of Colborne Lodge in High Park carefully preserved by the late Mr. J. G. Howard. Near this house are other oaks less remarkable. Within the memory of men still living some well developed old oak trees were to be seen at irregular intervals along the shore of the bay between the foot of George street and Berkeley street. One especially was long preserved, opposite the residence of Mr. George Munro, some time Mayor, who did his best to preserve what used to be known as the Fair Green, now wholly built over. That oaks were to be found in other localities round Toronto may be concluded from the name Oak Hill, applied to the property of General Shaw, before referred to. In and just outside the grounds of the new Upper Canada College buildings, on the brow of the Davenport or Spadina rise of land, on the northern side of the city, are to be seen some fine old oaks happily preserved. The old trees still remaining just below the front of Spadina House, on this ridge of land, are also oaks. Again, far to the north, we have the Oakridges, so called probably from ancient specimens there seen. Oakville is also a reminiscence of this tree, as an object noticeable along the north shore of our lake.

Finally the pine must be noticed, a tree which formed so marked a feature in the scenery round Toronto formerly. The steep, sandy banks of the Don, on both sides, were within my own recollection lined with fine tall specimens of the white pine, and a few remaining examples of these are to be seen along the brow of the hill, on the eastern bound-

ary of what was known as the Castle Frank property, a portion of which is now included in the St. James Cemetery. Trees of the yellow pine species were to be seen in abundance on the Humber Plains, but sparingly along the Don. At the northern end of the Moss Park lot towards Bloor street, a solitary relic of the flourishing white pine forest hereabout was long a conspicuous object and gave rise to some graceful fugitive verses which I have preserved at p.p. 231-32 of "Toronto of Old," not knowing them then, as I have since learned them to have been, the handiwork of the late Senator Macdonald, long before he was dignified with that title. The last three stanzas, supposed to be utterances of this tree, including several happy forecasts, are appended.

The pale face came, our ranks were thinned,
And the loftiest were brought low,
And the forest faded far and wide
Beneath his sturdy blow ;
And the steamer on the quiet lake,
Then ploughed its way of foam,
And the red man fled from the scene of strife
To find a wilder home.

And many who in childhood's days
Around my trunk have played,
Are resting like the Indian now
Beneath the cedar's shade ;
And I, like one bereft of friends,
With winter whitened o'er,
But wait the hour that I must fall,
As others fell before.

And still what changes wait thee,
When at no distant day,
The ships of far-off nations
Shall anchor in your bay ;
When one vast chain of railroad,
Stretching from shore to shore,
Shall bear the wealth of India,
And land it at your door.

It will not be uninteresting to add that our first Lieut.-Governor, Gen. Simcoe, was so well pleased with the productions of our Canadian woods and forests, that he took the trouble to have specimens of many of them planted and

cultivated within the grounds surrounding his pleasant home in Devonshire. Thus we have Mr. Charles Vancouver, in his "General View of the Agriculture of the County of Devon," remarking: "At Wolford considerable attention was paid by General Simcoe to the culture of exotic as well as of the native trees of the country. The black spruce of Newfoundland the red spruce of Norway. the Weymouth pine, pinaster, stone and cluster pine, the American sycamore or button-wood, the black walnut, red oak, hickory, sassafras, red bud, with many smaller trees and shrubs, forming the undergrowth of the forests in that country, are all found to grow at Dunkeswell, i. e. Wolford, with considerable strength and vigour." Many of these Canadian specimens I have myself seen near Wolford, still in a flourishing condition.

These notices of forest survivals in our midst may help to foster and maintain an interest in our forest trees generally. It is most desirable that, so far as it shall be practicable, our remaining forests should be preserved, and wherever an undue, thoughtless destruction of them occurred, that they should be judiciously replaced by some system of planting. It is hoped likewise that all lovers and admirers of these beautiful natural objects may be induced to give their hearty support to the Government of our Province in its desire to establish public parks on a large scale, as it has recently done in the case of the Algonquin Reserve, consisting of over 988,000 acres, situated on the watershed between the rivers flowing into the Ottawa on the east, and the Georgian Bay on the west. Let us hope also that our words may do something towards confirming the Government at Ottawa in its determination to retain the Canadian portion of the Thousand Isles in the River St. Lawrence, with their sylvan garniture intact, as another national Plaisance on a large scale accessible to all.

Mr. Edgar Jarvis, of Elm Avenue, Rose-dale, writes to me of a fine elm on the grounds

of the old Rosedale homestead, formerly occupied by the well-remembered Sheriff, W. B. Jarvis, not, however, an original denizen of the forest, but a tree planted by the hand of Amelia daughter of Frederic Starr Jarvis, in the year 1830, and now rising to the height of 75 feet, and spreading its branches over an area of nearly 100 feet in diameter. Also of a gigantic white oak, a genuine survivor of the forest, on Mr. Hamilton's property, near the north iron bridge. Of this tree Mr. Jarvis writes that it is ten feet in circumference at its base, a foot above the surface. It shoots up gracefully, tapering in size without a lateral branch, for forty feet, when it spreads out and upwards, with a beautiful green head rustling in the breeze. The total height is nearly 90 feet. It is the product of an acorn dropped in the ground probably about the time of Samuel Champlain.

A study of the two graceful young elm trees to be seen in the grounds of the old Upper Canada College, on King Street, would help us to form an estimate of the age of elms that we see growing elsewhere. The elms in front of the college buildings are to my certain knowledge more than sixty years old. These again, strictly speaking, are not survivors of the original forest. They were deliberately planted in a sapling state for an ornamental purpose in the position they now occupy, as was the case with the elm in Rosedale alluded to by Mr. Jarvis. It is to be hoped that it may not be the fate of these beautiful objects to be ruthlessly rooted up and destroyed.